

# ART SPIEL

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## Trusting Hands at Andrew Edlin Gallery

One finds a simple common thread between the three exhibitions of women artists in Andrew Edlin Gallery this fall 2021: spiritual internal guidance in the artistic process. The work of German artist and known medium healer Agatha Wojciechowsky (1896-1986), curated by Aurelie Bernard Wortsman, is in *Spirits Among Us* at the entry and main gallery space, while the work of French artist Margot (b. 1982) is in *Margot's Cosmic Sanctuary* at the back gallery. The solo presentation of American artist Karla Knight (b. 1958) was at the recent Independent Art Fair in New York City, which briefly overlapped with these two fall



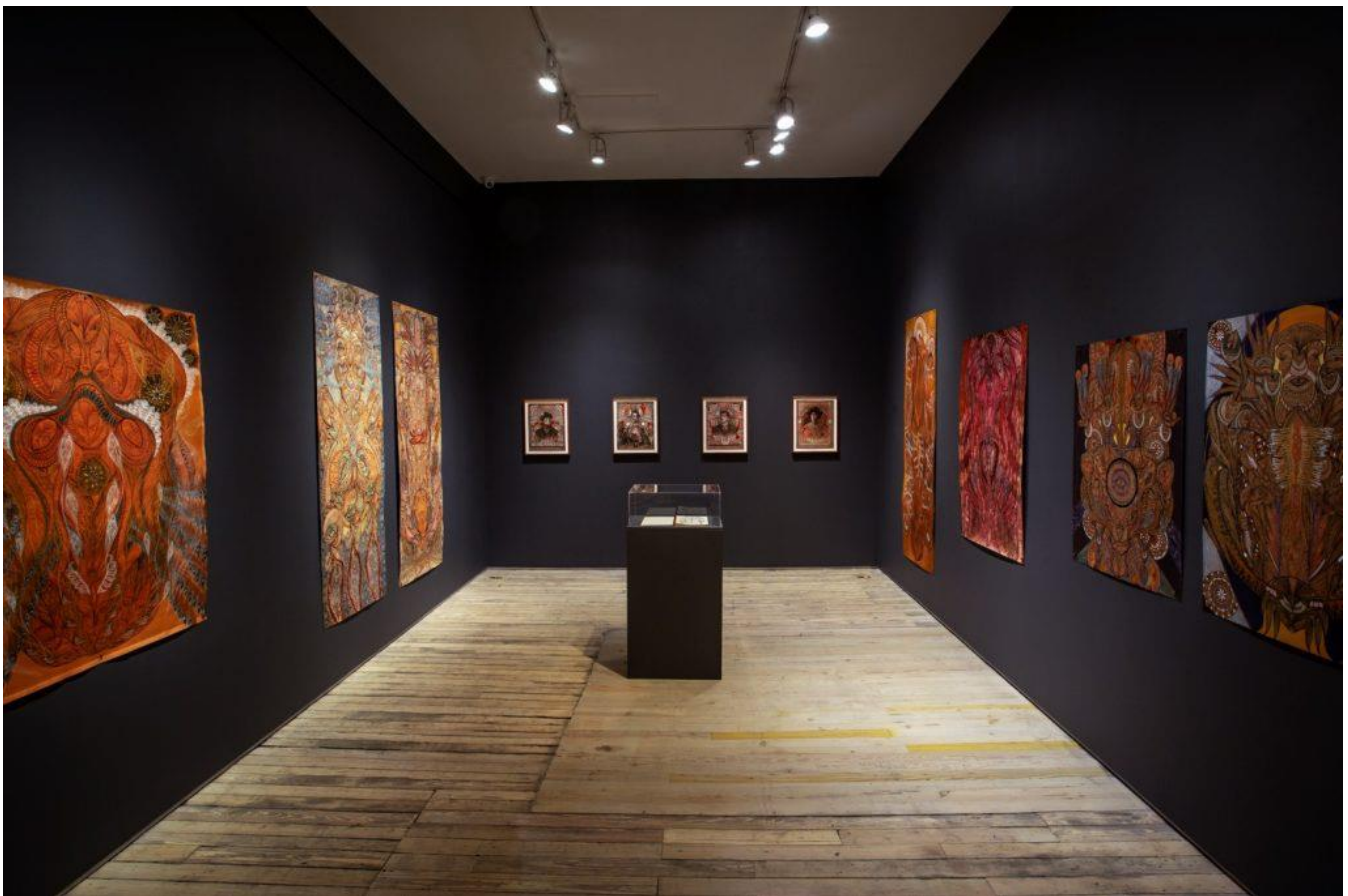
Agatha Wojciechowsky, *Untitled*, c. 1974-1978. Collection of Steven Day. Courtesy Andrew Edlin Gallery; the Artist's estate; Day Art Consulting LLC.

season starters at the gallery. Led by their individual connection to the otherworldly, the artists make work that invites viewers to ponder the source of creation and artistic agency.

With the encouragement of her Native American spirit guide and spiritual gatekeeper, Agatha Wojciechowsky started to strap a pencil to her hands sometime after World War II, which began her

automatic writings and art-making. A few examples of her writing are on display, which, similar to Knight's created language, are ideographic. As a medium, she believed that the art

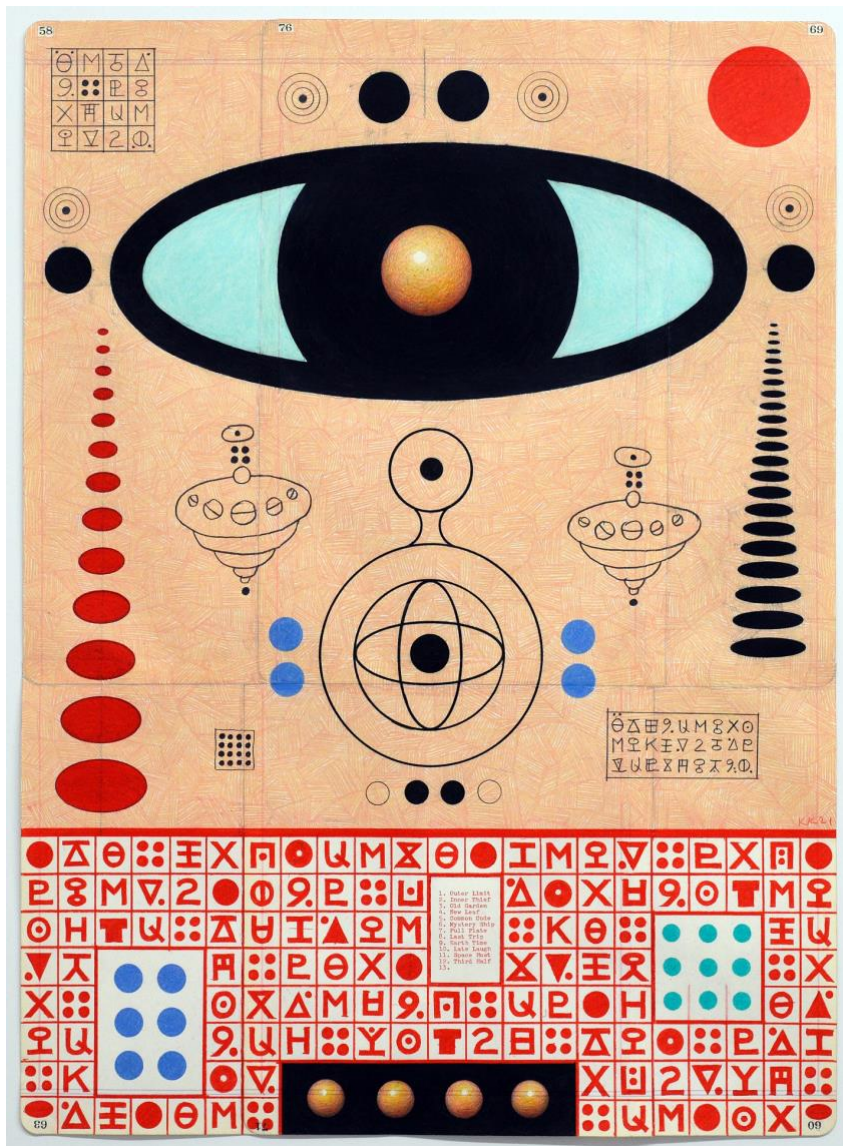
is the work of the spirits, for which she was only their brush. The exhibition includes work from 1951 to 1978, which Wortsman lays out more or less chronologically, to show the progression in the artist's oeuvre. Better known for her surrealistic landscape paintings from the late 1960s and 1970s where faces are anchored in more earthly realms, her later work evolves into abstraction with expressive souls appearing and disappearing into washes of colors, as in *Untitled* (c. 1974-1978). Wojciechowsky illustrates the floating amoeba-like spirits she saw in her trance states. She articulates these beings in the primordial soup of fantastical colors. Providing audiences with her lens into what is beyond the veil, she invites us to trust the unknown as something one could access, if there's belief.



*Installation of "Margot's Cosmic Sanctuary," photo credit Olya Vysotskaya, courtesy Andrew Edlin Gallery.*

The act of understanding arises from giving oneself over to the spiritual. Margot shared that in 2014 that she was taken over the inexplicable desire to produce images. Like Wojciechowsky, Margot also expresses that spirits take her hands to make work. Unlike Wojciechowsky's works on paper, which are primarily watercolors and charcoal with edges that bleed and blur, Margot uses inks, pens, pencils, and pastels with fine points to create

the thin-line drawings. Many of her works included in the show, like *Ostium Genesis* (from the series *Corpus Templum*, 2017), are alter-sized. The large scale transforms the deep-grey back gallery into a chapel-like space, meant for contemplation and slow study of many details. Even her smaller works on vintage portrait photographs extrude a presence that demands attention, like the works of British mediumistic artist Madge Gill (1882-1961) also over portrait photographs. Much of Margot's iconography is based on nature, from leafy overlays to crowned insects. These patterns are spiraling and wrapping around teardrop-shaped masked figures that seem to unfurl from the busy underbrush.



Karla Knight, *Spaceship Drawing (Outer Limit)*, 2021.  
 Courtesy Andrew Edlin Gallery.

Compared to Margot's enmeshed and interwoven drawings, Karla Knight's compositions are rather linear and angular. However, upon inspection, it's easy to see how Knight fits into the threesome. Inspired by Lakota Winter counts (their calendar representing their oral histories, made on rawhide), Knight paints on sourced cotton seed bags and ledger paper that range in size from posters to area rugs. Making her own language, the artist incorporates the remnants of these functional surfaces into her stele-like works that contain many text-like codes and alien symbols. With no

decoding tools from the artist, the indecipherable quality of the work is contrasted by the clear overarching organization of the works, which grounds spectators to orderly viewing

experiences. For example, the top two-thirds of *Spaceship Drawing (Outer Limit)* (2021) contains spaceship diagrams and several celestial orbs, while the bottom is a grid of her ideograms with a legend that does not refer to figures in the upper half of the composition. Like her gallery counterparts, whose works contain figures in flux that are hard to ascribe narratives, Knight's defined structure looks like a manual in a foreign language, which comforts and frustrates the viewer, because we are just always shy of understanding.

Wojciechowsky, Margot, and Knight each said in their own way that something flows through them in their art-making process. Whether it is in the automatic writing or image and language making, their relationship to the spiritual and the universal allows them to freely form and improvise in their work. While they might define themselves as only the channel from the beyond, one undeniably experiences the many formal and conceptual choices these artists make. Their offerings in art reach into viewers' perception of reality and share new visions and possibilities. Seeing their great accumulation of imagery is a mind-expanding encounter.

**Sophia Ma** is a curator and writer. She researched for architectural historian Victoria Newhouse on her most recent book, *Parks of the Twentieth Century: Reinvented Landscapes, Reclaimed Territories*, from its inception in 2016 to its publication with Rizzoli New York, September 2021. Ma curated for *SPRING/BREAK Art Show New York 2020* and worked on Arshile Gorky's catalogue raisonné for the artist's foundation. She also worked in development, programming, and operations for the Museum of Chinese in America. In the Fall of 2020, Ma completed her master's in art history and curatorial studies from Hunter College, CUNY, with a thesis on the relationship between the work and spiritual practices of the abstract painter Bernice Lee Bing (1936-1998). Currently, Ma writes for multiple online art publications, including *The Brooklyn Rail*, *Hyperallergic*, *Art Spiel*, *Arte Fuse*, and *White Hot Magazine*.